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BOOK REPORTS--PRACTICES AND RECOMMENDATIONS.

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A PROJECT WHOSE AIM WAS TO DEVELOP BOOK-REPORTING PROCEDURES WHICH WOULD EFFECTIVELY STIMULATE AND ENCOURAGE WIDE INDEPENDENT READING AND THE MASTERY OF APPROPRIATE BOOK-REPORTING SKILLS IS SUMMARIZED AND EVALUATED. A SUMMARY OF THE FINDINGS AND CONCLUSIONS OF A SURVEY OF CURRENT BOOK-REPORTING PRACTICES IN GRADES 2-7, CONDUCTED THROUGH PERSONAL INTERVIEWS BY READING CONSULTANTS IN THE UPPER DUBLIN SCHOOL DISTRICT, FORT WASHINGTON, PENNSYLVANIA, IS PRESENTED IN THE FIRST PORTION OF THE ARTICLE. THE FINAL AND MAJOR PORTION CONTAINS (1) SIX RECOMMENDED EDUCATIONAL OBJECTIVES, (2) A STATEMENT ON THE DESIRABILITY OF FLEXIBLE RATHER THAN RIGID REQUIREMENTS, (3) A LISTING AND DESCRIPTION OF FIVE LEVELS OF BOOK-REPORT WRITING WHICH CAN BE ADAPTED TO EACH CHILD'S WRITTEN LANGUAGE MATURITY, (4) SUGGESTED PROCEDURES FOR ACCOMPLISHING DIFFERENTIATION BASED ON READING LEVELS, AND (5) A LIST OF OTHER TYPES OF REPORTING WHICH SHOULD STIMULATE CHILDREN TO READ INDEPENDENTLY. THIS ARTICLE APPEARED IN "ELEMENTARY ENGLISH," VOLUME 44 (OCTOBER 1967), 609-12. (MM)

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Book Reports: Practices and Recommendations

Do written book reports encourage or inhibit independent reading? Do they help a child to extend his interests and reading skills? When these questions are raised, tentative and inconclusive solutions are often offered and our attention is frequently shifted to other more "pressing" problems.

A desire to answer adequately the above questions plus the expressed interest of children, teachers, and parents spurred the reading consultants in Upper Dublin to undertake a survey of the current book reporting practices in grades two through seven. A personal interview approach was utilized in securing the answers to the following questions:

1. How many books are the children required to read?
2. How many and what type of written reports are used?
3. What other types of reporting are used?
4. Are book reporting assignments and book requirements differentiated on the basis of reading levels?

Present Practices: Results of Survey

Grades Two and Three

With the exception of two third-grade teachers, no requirements were made as to the number of books read. One required two a week and the other, one for each unit of study.

The authors are all members of the Upper Dublin School District, Fort Washington, Pennsylvania. Miss Martin and Mr. Hoffman are reading consultants. Dr. Brown is an administrative assistant in charge of curriculum.

The majority of the teachers did not require any written reports. A few had children write reports in the latter part of the year. The reports in grade two included the title, author, part liked best, and where the book was secured. In third grade the title, author, a few sentences about the book, and the child's opinion were required. One teacher had the children write summary reports including the title, author, and sequence of the story in a book report notebook. Some others had the children write reports on a voluntary basis.

Many of the teachers utilized other means of checking the children's independent reading. These included reading favorite parts of books aloud, giving oral reports on a favorite part of a book, making dioramas, illustrating part of a story, creating puppets and puppet plays, dramatizing parts of stories, predicting the story by looking at illustrations and book covers.

The chief differentiation was evidenced by teacher guidance in book selection. Many were of the opinion that this met the needs of the children of varying levels. A few teachers required only the most advanced readers to write reports.

Grades Four Through Six

Some of the fourth and fifth-grade teachers required a larger number of books to be read than did the sixth-grade teachers. These assignments ranged from none to twenty-five books.

Requirements for written book reports

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were considerably higher for fourth- and fifth-grade pupils than for sixth. The range extended from none to twenty-five in the fourth and fifth grades, and from none to ten in the sixth grade.

Other types of reporting being used were oral reports, dittoed forms, file cards, personal exchange, bulletin board games, plays, puppets, and illustrated book jackets.

The largest number of teachers differentiated by the number of books required; others by mark or grade given, by level, and type of report.

Grade Seven

In the seventh grade of the junior high school, requirements for book reports were more lenient than in some intermediate grades. Books to be read ranged in number from none or no set number to twelve, while written reports ranged in number from three to nine in academic sections, and from none to nine in non-academic sections. All teachers differentiated requirements, usually by the level of difficulty of the book.

Conclusions

1. There were extreme differences within and among grades in the number of required books to be read, the number of required written reports, and the methods used to report books read.
2. Inconsistencies of requirements were noted in regard to child maturity and language development.
3. A need was evidenced for a written policy on book reporting in the Upper Dublin Elementary schools.

Recommendations and Comments—Educational Objectives

After careful reflective study with staff members of various grades, the following objectives were accepted:

1. Attention should be given to a child's level of language development in listening, speaking, reading, and writing when assigning book reports. Written book requirements may inhibit reading if differentiation in assignments is not followed.
2. The purpose of a child's reading on his own should be to help him apply and extend his language skills and develop independent habits.
3. The child's interest should be paramount in selection of books to be read.
4. Book report writing should be taught as a purposeful activity.
5. Books of interest on varied levels should be made available.
6. Planned activities for stimulating interest in reading independently should be presented.

Requirements

Although it is important that all children read regularly, the value of rigid requirements in independent reading is questionable. With proper stimulation and encouragement, requirements should be unnecessary. A survey of the children's interests should be made and books based on these interests should be made available to them. When enthusiasm is high in any subject field, reading materials at various levels in that area should be provided. Reading should be made a pleasure, not a chore.

Written Book Reports

Do written book reports accomplish our objectives? Would the time used in writing book reports be more profitably spent in independent reading? It is evident from our experience that book reports do not necessarily encourage wide reading. Reading is *more* important than writing reports.

Children should be taught how to write a good book report but should have a valid reason for doing it. Some reasons might be

to publish in a class or school newspaper, to post on a bulletin board, or to learn how to write a report.

It is important for all children to think actively when reading and to be able to write a critical appraisal of some of the books they have read. Therefore it seems apropos that when a child completes sixth grade he should be able to write a satisfactory report on his individual language level. The following progression for attaining this goal is suggested. Some children may have reached an adequate level in written expression to begin in second or third grade; others may not be ready until fourth, fiifth, or sixth grade. On the basis of this understanding we have suggested to our teachers the following levels of book report writing which can be adapted to each child's written language maturity.

Level One

Record the title, author, number of pages read and one sentence stating the reader's opinion of the book on a 4" x 6" card. Arrange the cards in order of the date completed.

Level Two

Use a 5" x 8" card to record the title, author, and four sentences on each of the following:

1. General idea of the book (subject, or the who, what, and where of the book).
2. Part liked best.
3. Why or why not recommend the book.
4. Where book was secured.

Level Three

Use the same form as level two but expand each of the first three points to a two or three sentence paragraph. Variations might include telling just enough of the story to invite others to read it, or discussing a character.

Level Four

Use the following outline:

I. Title and author
II. Type of story
III. Setting place and time
IV. Main idea or subject
V. Outstanding qualities or features
VI. General comments or opinions

Level Five

Use to encourage children who are able to go beyond the requirements of level four. The following are merely suggestions. Add to or expand depending on individual needs.

1. Comparison of books—by same author or different ones.
2. Characterizations.
3. Creating different endings.
4. Research report on an author.
5. Discussion of effect of book on reader.

In utilizing the above levels, the following procedures are recommended:

1. The teacher should read brief well-organized and phrased reports written by professionals to the class (New York *Times*—Sunday Supplement; *Boy's Life*).
2. Each reading group should discuss and establish standards for a report.
3. The teacher should read a short story to each group for the purpose of writing a report.
4. Each group should evaluate the report according to the standards established by them.
5. Each group should select a story from their reader to compose a group report.
6. These reports should be evaluated within each group.
7. Individuals should write reports on stories read independently.
8. Individual reports should be evaluated within each group.

9. The following maximum standards for written book reports should be used:

Grade	*Maximum Numbers*	*Levels for Written Book Reports*
2	0	1,2
3	1-2	1,2
4	1-4	1,2,3
5	1-4	1,2,3,4,5
6	1-6	1,2,3,4,5

It is strongly recommended that:

a. Requirements for grade levels do not exceed the above number.
b. Children whose language development is below the average of the class in intermediate grades be allowed to use levels one to three in completing book report requirements.
c. Capable students having attained the maximum standards and demonstrated a level of proficiency in writing book reports should be encouraged to use this time in free reading or in other creative writing activities.

Differentiation based on reading levels

In order to encourage each child to read books challenging and interesting to him we suggested the following procedure:

1. Book selection:
   a. Survey interests of children and record for reference.
   b. Work with librarian to select books appropriate to reading levels and interests of children.
   c. Bring the books to the children.
2. Level and type of reporting:
   a. Use simple card file reports for those on lower writing levels even in the intermediate grades.
   b. Increase the complexity of the report as soon as a child is ready to progress.
   c. Use special assignments of a creative type for those on a high level of writing.
3. Use of reading groups:
   a. Discuss a book or story read by a group.
   b. Discuss different books written on the same theme for comparison.
   c. Teach methods of writing reports appropriate to levels.

Other types of reporting for stimulating reading

There are many ways in which children can be interested in reading independently. These can include a variety of areas for expression such as dramatizations, oral reading, discussions, clubs, illustrations, construction, bulletin boards, book corners, and creative writing. Specific suggestions for these areas can be secured from the sources listed below.

We have been very gratified with the results of this survey. As it was being conducted, a good deal of interest was expressed by the teachers in the project. They were eager to know what conclusions might be drawn from the data. These results were presented in inservice meetings in a "give and take fashion." We feel that the outcomes of this study have been procedures which can effectively stimulate and encourage wide independent reading as well as the mastery of appropriate book reporting skills.

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